

# Getting There

News from the Blue Ribbon Commission  
on Transportation  
Summer 1999



## Transportation — A Statewide Discussion

**W**hether you spend your day trading financial stocks or trading livestock, transportation is an important issue. The focus may be different, but transportation seems to be near the top of everyone's list, no matter where they live in Washington. A trucker in Stevens County may be concerned about the condition of local roads; a city official in the Tri-Cities may wonder how local government will

be able to fund its road maintenance and improvement needs in the coming year; a commuter in Tacoma may be upset at being stuck in traffic; and someone in Clark County may wonder how all the new housing and population growth is going to be accommodated within the existing transportation system. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation was formed to take a broad look at the numerous transportation issues and concerns that have been expressed around this state, and to frame a twenty-year



Rural, urban, suburban, small town — transportation is everyone's concern.

photos: Puget Sound Regional Council

approach to address these concerns. The commission is looking at the various systems that make up transportation in this state, among them the systems for infrastructure, administration, and financing transportation projects and programs. Following a series of briefings on numerous important topics, commission members selected the list of topics most aligned with the mission of the Blue Ribbon Commission, and the Commission staff produced a series of discussion papers on those topics. In this newsletter

we give you the first look at some of the topics that the Commission will discuss in the months ahead. Three topics — governance, maintenance, and traffic congestion — are covered here (in highly condensed form). The complete set of fifteen discussion papers about a variety of transportation issues identified by the commission will be published, in their entirety, on the Commission's internet

site ([www.brct.wa.gov](http://www.brct.wa.gov)).

From these discussion papers will come the Commission's preliminary findings and benchmarks this autumn and, in spring, a preliminary package of recommendations.

In the months ahead, we will continue this discussion on transportation, through public hearings and meetings, through this newsletter and other publications, through phone and E-mail, and through our website. We welcome your comments. See the back page for information on how to reach us.

# Who's in Charge Here?

## AUTHORITY AND FRAGMENTATION IN TRANSPORTATION GOVERNANCE

**A**t last count, there were 468 entities responsible for some form of transportation in Washington state, including government bodies, regulatory and

for state-owned modes of transportation (including ferries, rail, and aviation), but not for city- and county-owned streets and roads. Funding and policy decisions for

statewide, indicates that voters are dissatisfied with the current system. On the other hand, numerous efforts have been made in the past decade to improve intergov-

*"There are 468 entities responsible for some form of transportation in Washington state."*

planning agencies, transit authorities, port districts, and tribes.

Of the over 80,000 miles of roadway in Washington state, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) controls 8.8%, or about 7,000 miles.

In 1977, many statewide transportation functions were newly consolidated into WSDOT. The department sets service objectives

local roads are made by the individual organizations themselves. This structure makes it difficult to coordinate all transportation investments and operations across modes and across jurisdictions.

### FUTURE OUTLOOK

Increasing action by citizens on taxes and major construction projects at the ballot or through citizen initiatives, both locally and

ernmental coordination, including on transportation projects.

*Possible approaches and new models of transportation governance are being explored across the country and around the world. The complete discussion paper, "Governance Structures," covers this topic, as well as case studies from other areas, in greater detail. See the paper at the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation's website ([www.brct.wa.gov](http://www.brct.wa.gov)).*

# Where the Traffic Takes You

## Who pays for traffic congestion?

**P**eople spend more than 100 million hours each year stuck in Washington's traffic. Traffic congestion is a chronic problem facing every metropolitan area, one that imposes an enormous impact on our lives and our economy. Can it be cured?

Why is there congestion? First of all, population is increasing. That means more commuting to work, and more cars on the roadways. Second, people are driving more. Third, roads are not being built as fast as traffic is growing. Fourth, changing people's driving habits is not easy.

### POSSIBLE APPROACHES

The approaches described below have been identified by transportation experts and economists as



possible ways of dealing with traffic congestion. Some of these methods have already been tried in Washington state; others have been employed in other cities, states, or countries.

- Add more lanes — Because road capacity has not kept pace with the growth in travel, more roadway lanes could be added where feasible in the most congested regions.
- Add more HOV or HOT lanes — High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes give buses and carpools a speed advantage over solo drivers. High-Occupancy/Toll (HOT) lanes would allow

solo drivers to use existing HOV lanes for a fee. Revenues from the tolls could be used for road improvements.

- More and better transit — An extensive network of fast, frequent, and reliable bus or rail transit could be a desirable alternative to driving, and would expand a region's range of transportation options.
- Intelligent transportation systems (ITS) — ITS aims to improve the efficiency of the existing system. Programs include ramp metering, traffic information systems, and quick responses to accidents or breakdowns.

*continued on facing page*

# Road Care and Repair (from Wear and Tear)

## MAINTAINING AND PRESERVING WASHINGTON'S ROADWAYS

Washington's 80,000 miles of highways, streets, roads, and bridges comprise an investment of over \$100 billion. As the foundation for our current and future transportation system, this investment must be maintained to preserve its efficiency. Weather and usage are the primary contributors to poor road conditions. Other contributing factors include wear and tear from heavy vehicles, and the different standards to which roads are built.

Expenditures for maintenance closely track total traffic rather than overall lane miles. For example, although comprising less than 10% of the total infrastructure, state highways carry more than half the total traffic. They receive nearly half (43%) of the total annual roadway expenditures statewide.

### STATE HIGHWAYS

WSDOT is responsible for over 7,000 miles of highway. Maintenance and preservation is WSDOT's highest priority, and

less than 10% of highway surfaces are in poor condition. WSDOT uses maintenance methods such as 'lowest lifecycle cost' and 'pavement management' to schedule and optimize its maintenance investment.

### CITY AND COUNTY ROADS

Most of the 39,000 miles of county-owned roads are rural, and over one-third are unpaved gravel roads. Cities and towns own a road network of 14,000 miles of local streets and arterials.

Cities and counties state that existing funding is inadequate to maintain their networks. Counties, on the average, are able to fund only two-thirds of total roadway maintenance each year, while cities are able to finance only one-third of maintenance needs.

### POSSIBLE APPROACHES

Increased funding is the most apparent solution. Combined with the use of maintenance methods, it would ensure the preservation of local roadways. Other solutions include city-county partnerships

for maintenance; disincentives for road uses that cause the most damage; and altering design standards.

*The complete paper, "Maintaining Washington's Roadways," covers this topic in greater detail, lists criteria for evaluating possible approaches, and briefly analyzes the potential of each method to successfully deal with the problem. See the paper at the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation's website ([www.brct.wa.gov](http://www.brct.wa.gov)).*

## COMPLETE LIST OF DISCUSSION PAPERS

*The following is the complete list of discussion papers to be prepared for the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation. Those with an asterisk (\*) are complete as of August 1, and are available for review on the BRCT's website ([www.brct.wa.gov](http://www.brct.wa.gov)). The remaining papers will be complete by October 1, 1999.*

### Benchmarks for Transportation

\*History of Transportation  
Legislation

Overview of Transportation  
Funding

Market Mechanisms and Innovative Financing

Gas Tax Distribution

Public Opinion of Revenue  
Options

\*Governance Structures

\*Permit Reform

Alternative Project Delivery  
Efficiencies

\*Congestion

\*Maintaining Washington's Roads  
Needs vs. Funding

Economic Development

Land Use and Transportation

\*Local Sources of Funding for  
City and County Transportation Needs

## Traffic Congestion *continued from page 2*

- Road pricing — Only drivers who actually use the roads would be paying for them. Tolls could be based upon time of day, level of congestion, or trip length.
- Cash out employer-paid parking — Employee parking is perceived as 'free' by many, but is actually a cost often subsidized by employers. Eliminating this subsidy could reduce the incentive for solo driving.
- Transportation demand manage-

ment (TDM) policies — Flextime, telecommuting, ride-sharing, and staggered hours are some methods to reduce the demand for commute driving.

*The complete discussion paper, "Congestion in Washington," covers this topic in greater detail, lists criteria for evaluating possible approaches, and briefly analyzes the potential of each method to successfully deal with the problem. See the paper at the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation's website ([www.brct.wa.gov](http://www.brct.wa.gov)).*



***“We envision a first-class transportation system supporting a strong economy and a high quality of life in Washington State.”***

***— vision statement of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation***

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